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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
Seventeenth session
1-12 May 1995

DRAFT REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly;"

and requested the Committee and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee, approved its report and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group, 1/ reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in resolution 34/182, and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. At its organizational session in 1980, the Committee agreed that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to forty-eighth sessions, the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee, approved its reports 2/ and its recommendations, and reaffirmed the mandate given to it in resolution 34/182 (resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162, 43/60, 44/50, 45/76, 46/73 B, 47/73 B and 48/44 B). At its forty-ninth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee 3/ and adopted its consensus recommendations (resolutions 49/38 A and B). The Assembly further requested the Committee to report to it at its fiftieth session.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely, China and Mexico; at its forty-first session the Assembly appointed Malta a member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, it appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe; and at its forty-fourth session it appointed Nepal.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay members of the Committee. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 members, and appointed Burkina Faso a member of the Committee.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 79 to 81 members, and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal members of the Committee.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 81 to 83 members, and appointed Gabon and Israel members of the Committee.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 83 to 88 members, and appointed Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa members of the Committee.

10. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zimbabwe

II. ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS

A. Opening of the session

11. The organizational meeting of the seventeenth session of the Committee was held at United Nations Headquarters on 1 May 1995. In the absence of the outgoing Chairman, the session was opened by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information on behalf of the Secretary-General. The Bureau was elected, with the exception of the Rapporteur, whose election was deferred until the second meeting. The Chairman and the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information made statements.

B. Election of officers

12. In accordance with the principle of geographic rotation, the Committee elected the following officers for the period 1995-1996:

Chairman: Mr. Ivan V. Maximov (Bulgaria)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. Alejandro H. Nieto (Argentina)
Mr. Minhaj Barna (Pakistan)
Mr. Jose Alberto de Sousa (Portugal)

Rapporteur: Mr. Fateh Zeghib (Algeria)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

13. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted, without objection, the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/1995/1):

1. Opening of the session.

2. Election of officers.

3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.

4. Statement by the Chairman.

5. Statement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information.

6. General debate and consideration of substantive questions:

   (a) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, and of the need to establish the new international economic order and the new world information and communication order;

   (b) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;

   (c) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information;

7. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session.

14. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its seventeenth session at United Nations Headquarters from 1 to 12 May 1995.

15. For its consideration of agenda item 6, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on the allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations to United Nations information centres in 1994 (A/AC.198/1995/2) and on the review of publications by the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/1995/3).

D. Observers

16. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Panama, Georgia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Suriname and Sweden. The representatives of the Holy See and Switzerland also participated as observers.

17. Representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Correspondents' Association (UNCA) and the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) also attended.

E. Other matters

18. The Committee decided to conduct further informal consultations through the Bureau, the spokespersons of the regional groups, the Group of 77 and China.

19. The Chairman informed the Committee that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had requested to become a member of the Committee.

20. In response to General Assembly resolution 49/233 B of 31 March 1995, the Extended Bureau brought to the attention of the Committee a paper containing a review of the Secretariat's policy on dissemination of information related to peace-keeping (see annex). The Committee took note of this review and will examine it further after its seventeenth session through its Extended Bureau.

III. GENERAL DEBATE AND CONSIDERATION OF SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

21. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burundi, Czech Republic, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Ethiopia, France (on behalf of the European Union), Guinea, Israel, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines (on behalf of the Group of 77), Russian Federation, South Africa, Syrian Arab Republic, Netherlands (on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States), Tunisia, Ukraine, Venezuela and Yemen. Statements were also made by the observers for Haiti, Kyrgyzstan and Panama. At the invitation of the Committee, the representatives of UNESCO and UNCA also addressed the Committee.

22. In addressing the substantive issues before the Committee, all speakers acknowledged the dynamic power of information in bringing the message of the United Nations - peace, democracy and development - to the world audience. In addition, they expressed their belief that communication was an important tool that could help all peoples attain their political, socio-economic and cultural objectives, unite them in awareness and aspiration, and shape the world of tomorrow. Information was both the mirror of today's realities and a powerful catalyst for change and development.

23. Most speakers expressed the view that the spirit of consensus, which had been sustained and consolidated in past years in the Committee, had been essential in allowing it to be a meaningful force for positive change and effectiveness in the public information policies of the United Nations. In the opinion of one speaker, who also spoke on behalf of a number of others, the active role of the Extended Bureau had improved the working relationship between the members of the Committee and the Department of Public Information and had contributed to transparency in the information process. This interaction, in the opinion of most speakers, had increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department over the last year and a half, and they were convinced that with the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information this partnership would continue and be further strengthened in the future.

24. All speakers pointed to the importance of commemorating World Press Freedom Day, 3 May, and solemnly recalled and remembered the unprecedented numbers of journalists who had been killed in the exercise of their profession in the previous year, as well as those who were detained in jails. A tribute was paid to the Algerian journalists who were the victims of fundamentalist terrorists. Another delegation reiterated the possibility of the creation of a legal instrument to protect journalists, especially those covering situations of social and military tension. It proposed that as a first step there should be legal protection through a special accreditation to the United Nations of those journalists who covered peace-keeping operations, which would allow them to pass freely and would help provide them with assistance and protection. All delegations reiterated that freedom of information was the touchstone of all the basic human freedoms, to be protected at all costs, and that, accordingly, the world press must be safeguarded from harassment and harm. Several delegations remarked that the theme of World Press Freedom Day in 1995, "the press for peace and tolerance", was in consonance with the declaration by the General Assembly of 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance. One speaker said that the Secretary-General had stated that the international media had an important role to play in promoting tolerance by bringing to light abuses against marginalized groups throughout the world. While many agreed that a free press was indispensable for promoting democracy and human rights, others, however, pointed out that it must be accompanied by responsibility and respect for cultural integrity and diversity.

25. A number of speakers commented on the professional cooperation between UNESCO and the Department of Public Information in organizing the regional seminars to promote pluralistic and varied media, held at Windhoek in 1991, Almaty in 1992 and Santiago in May 1994. Several speakers characterized those seminars as "turning-points" in the international debate on communications, and

many looked forward to the seminar planned for the Arab region at Sana'a in January 1996. One speaker suggested that such seminars be held annually.

26. A number of speakers stated their belief that all countries should have access to the flow of world information in a balanced and equitable order. Several speakers said that, in the communications field today, news about the rich and prosperous abounded, while the poor and disadvantaged were ignored in their misery. As one representative said, news from the developing world was often sensational. He praised the journalists who helped to rectify this unfortunate situation and protect against the destructive effects of press clichés, which were potentially harmful to some societies. Several speakers agreed that objectivity was a goal in the covering of international issues by the so-called "free" media, so that half-truths and innuendo would not be given credibility and stereotypes not accepted as unchallenged realities. It was important in the view of a number of speakers that technology be transferred from the developed to the developing countries in the field of information and communication, thus creating a partnership, with the common objective of sharing professional expertise and setting up a two-way information flow. Several speakers made the point that electronically transmitting United Nations materials had little impact when the infrastructures required to access the information were lacking. They stressed the importance of creating information and communication infrastructures in developing countries to help them truly become part of the "global village". In this connection speakers extended their support to the International Programme for the Development of Communication of UNESCO.

27. One speaker spoke out against the worsening violation of his country's sovereignty, alleging that denunciations of his country were being transmitted by means of radio and television broadcasts from another Member State in violation of international standards.

28. All speakers expressed their strong and continuing support for the work and activities of the Department of Public Information, and their appreciation for the Assistant Secretary-General's introductory speech and the reports of the Secretary-General before the Committee. The majority of speakers highlighted the innovative approaches of the Department, the strengthening of professionalism within its ranks and the pioneering role it had played within the Secretariat in the electronic dissemination of information. Many commended the Department for the new spirit of partnership, cooperation and transparency evidenced under the Assistant Secretary-General's leadership, which had resulted in strengthened outreach towards Member States and diverse media, and to educational institutions and non-governmental organizations. One delegation said that in less than two years the Assistant Secretary-General had restored a climate of confidence in the Department, which was greatly appreciated. While recognizing the complexity of the Department's task as a focal point of the information activities of the Organization, one representative on behalf of a number of others welcomed the fact that the Department had operated during the past year more than ever before as an integral part of a well-defined United Nations information strategy. One speaker said that the endeavours and achievements of the United Nations in social development, peace-keeping, self-determination and human rights would go unnoticed and unfulfilled without the excellent work of the Department.

29. Another speaker characterized the management of the Department as dynamic and action-oriented. It was agreed that the Department had a particularly important role to play in responding to the heightened public interest in the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization. In its work it was, therefore, more than ever necessary to project a unified and positive image of the Organization and to disseminate its success stories as widely as possible. Several speakers said that they thought the "UN Minute" video segments covering the history of the Organization were especially noteworthy in this regard. One speaker said that the Department should intensify its efforts to commemorate the historic San Francisco meeting, which marked the end of a brutal war, the defeat of fascism and the beginning of an era of peace. Many stressed the view that it was imperative for the Department to continue to restructure and redirect its resources in response to changing information priorities. It was acknowledged by many that this was being done, although some believed that more could always be done. On the other hand, another speaker, who also represented a large group, said that in the pursuit of cost-effectiveness, the wishes of the majority of Member States should not be forgotten. The Department should receive the necessary budget allocations for the performance of its tasks. Several others echoed this sentiment, one delegation maintaining, for example, that if a particular publication were to be needed, it should be produced regardless of cost, so that the goals and the objectives of the United Nations would not be disregarded.

30. Another speaker suggested that the Department must lead in the global struggle to ensure that information and information technology was the servant and not the master. He hoped that the Department would give some guidance to the branches of the United Nations family, ensuring that they did not abuse the easy electronic access now existing and that audiences were not drowned in a sea of paper or electronic signals. One speaker, speaking also on behalf of a large group, reiterated his group's appreciation to the Secretary-General for the attention he had given to information work within the system.

31. One representative suggested that the Department, on behalf of the Organization, must not be afraid to stride along bold, new information paths and even reiterated his delegation's suggestion, made during the previous session of the General Assembly, that the Secretary-General might consider appearing on popular talk-shows and teaching new constituencies about the Organization. Several speakers emphasized the importance of the Department's getting the United Nations message out to young people and in this connection stressed the importance of a partnership with universities and other educational institutions. This teaching role of the Department was expanded upon by one representative who strongly believed in the importance of peace education and suggested that media programmes could be developed for this purpose. For example, he mentioned the possibility of a peace education programme, which the Department should promote, involving the creation of a concept of human values that went beyond specific identities, and the recognition, appreciation and respect for diversity on the one hand and the realization of common human origin and values on the other. The subject of the Department's training of journalists, who could help to impart peace education and counteract media propagating hatred and xenophobia, was also raised.

32. Most speakers praised the Department's multi-media expansion into information dissemination and outreach on the Internet and other electronic networks. They characterized this new direction as perhaps the most dynamic area of information activity undertaken by the Department in recent years, which had greatly increased its outreach and advocacy to vast potential audiences worldwide. Representatives pointed out concrete and positive results of the Department's upgrading and use of more sophisticated informational capabilities, citing specifically their improved access to the materials in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library through electronic networks, as well as to United Nations news and activities by telephone via the United Nations News Electronic Bulletin Board. In supporting this policy of increasing the United Nations presence on the "information superhighway", one speaker on behalf of a number of others said that the necessary funds should be made available to the Department to allow it to keep pace with modern information techniques, if necessary by budgetary reallocation, particularly in the areas of radio and television. Others agreed that additional expenditures would prove to be worthwhile outlays for effective communication to the outside world.

33. Reiterating the integral relationship between peace and development, a number of speakers pointed to the Secretary-General's supplement to his Agenda for Peace and his Agenda for Development as important information priorities of the Organization. Several speakers suggested that the departmental resources freed by the discontinuation of the anti-apartheid information activities could be reallocated to economic and social development and democracy in Africa in general, and in southern Africa in particular. Some delegations expressed strong support for a World Week for Peace and urged delegations to join in sponsoring a proposal which was being submitted to this effect. On the other hand, a number of delegations noted that, while the United Nations had been called to play an increased role in the field of international peace and security, it was equally important that the Department be an advocate for sustainable development activities of the Organization. One speaker said that it must step up its efforts in this regard.

34. All speakers stressed the important role that the information programmes and activities of the Department could play in contributing to the success of the many peace-keeping missions of the Organization. They pointed out that a timely and integrated information campaign could be helpful in forming a positive climate of world opinion, both in the troop-contributing countries and in the countries where the missions were deployed, and that more funds should be allocated for this purpose. Accordingly, many speakers representing all groups of Member States, favoured the idea of the Department's increased involvement in support for United Nations peace-keeping and other political missions, which entailed introducing an information component into each mission at the very earliest planning stages, so that the Department would be included in early planning missions. In this connection, it was important that the Department and the relevant departments, in particular the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, further enhance their cooperation and coordination. One speaker, representing a troop-contributing country of long standing, asked that the Department be given a greater role in devising information campaigns for those missions, which would impart to the public in those countries a clearer picture of what the United Nations could and could not do in a given operation.

Another representative said that, in his view, because peace-keeping operations did not always bring with them immediate political solutions, it was imperative that the public be made aware of the exact mandate of each mission to avoid unnecessary confusion.

35. One delegation, on behalf of a large group, and a number of other speakers stressed the particular benefits to be gained from the use of United Nations radio, which could have an immense influence on the effectiveness of United Nations operations and serve as an important confidence-building measure. Another representative said that his group could not understand how the use of radio by the United Nations could be perceived as a threat by some countries and called, therefore, on Governments to provide every assistance in those instances where a radio broadcasting system was being installed by a peace-keeping operation. Such a capacity, in the opinion of one speaker, was needed to strengthen both peace-keeping operations and humanitarian activities.

36. One delegation specifically requested that the Department initiate special radio broadcasts in French Creole for the Caribbean region, which it thought would be especially beneficial to local populations to help clarify the aims of the United Nations Mission in Haiti. One delegation commended the Department in general for the efficiency, productivity and excellence of the Caribbean Radio Unit during yet another year. On the general subject of the advantages of radio broadcasting, one speaker alluded to its importance to millions of people all over the world and requested that more frequencies and time be allotted to radio programmes in some of the regional languages of his country, such as Urdu.

37. All speakers were supportive of the Organization's cycle of international conferences on economic and social issues and greatly appreciated the Department's commendable role in bringing the messages of those conferences to the forefront of the international agenda. In this connection, one representative said that the press kits were of particular value. The work related to the World Summit for Social Development was singled out by a number of delegations as an outstanding example of the Department's recent successful information campaigns. One speaker, noting that 2,900 journalists had been accredited to the Summit, said that the media coverage for that conference had been the most substantial of any of the Organization's economic and social activities, demonstrating that the United Nations was indeed a major contributor in the field of information on sustainable and human development. Many delegations also expressed appreciation for the preparatory work being done for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September, and one representative said that his country's positive cooperation with the Department in this connection would surely contribute to the success of the Conference. It was important, in the view of one speaker, that the Department continue to evaluate the content of its information campaigns, by studying exactly what was published and with what goal in mind. One delegation praised the Department's publications programme on sustainable development issues.

38. Several representatives expressed the view that support for the peace process in the Middle East and assistance to the Palestinian people continued to be one of the priorities of the United Nations and supported the Department's ongoing information activities in this area. One speaker suggested that fact-finding missions for the press must be sponsored to that region. Several

also pointed specifically to the Department's seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people in the field of media development, held at Madrid earlier in the year. Several speakers paid tribute to the tireless work of the Department in bringing to an end the apartheid regime in South Africa.

39. Several delegations made reference to the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster in 1996 and asked that the Department develop and implement a programme of activities to commemorate that tragic event. One delegation expressed its appreciation for the Assistant Secretary-General's initiative of appointing a special coordinator for dissemination of information for the tenth anniversary of the disaster.

40. One delegation welcomed the fact that the Publications Board had succeeded in revitalizing the publications programme of the Department. Many speakers referred positively to the Department's publications, which they believed were helping to create a positive image of the Organization, and stressed the criteria that they should be cost-effective, timely and issued in response to real needs. Several pointed to the usefulness of the Department's new publication, Development Update. Several delegations urged the need for early resumption of the publication Development Forum. Another delegation pointed to the value of Development Business and other publications on economic and social issues being widely distributed to libraries around the world. Another speaker congratulated the staff of Africa Recovery for a publication of high editorial and production standards. One speaker referred to that publication and other recurrent publications, UN Chronicle and the Yearbook of the United Nations, and suggested the release of major recurrent publications also in French. Some speakers asked that more Department materials be published in Russian, which was important not only for the Russian Federation but also for the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

41. Many delegations praised the recently launched Blue Book series as a valuable resource for an important constituency of scholars, researchers and journalists, and one speaker characterized them as "must-have" books for everyone interested in a serious evaluation of United Nations activities. In this connection, the same representative wished to encourage the Department to take advantage of the demand for such research materials and to promote sales in order to increase revenues for the United Nations. As to the timing and choice of subject-matter in the series, he suggested that the issues to be covered would be those on which the United Nations had recently concluded a major stage of its involvement and on which the community of students of the United Nations was only about to begin undertaking a review.

42. One delegation, on behalf of a large group, welcomed the improvement in quality and speed of issue of the press releases in both working languages. One speaker said that he would like very much to have press releases in Spanish, but realized there were budgetary considerations on this proposal.

43. On the subject of media relations, several speakers paid tribute to the Spokesman's Office for the important contributions that it made on a daily basis. The observer for UNCA said that relations between his group and the senior officers of the Department had improved considerably, and that the latter had gone out of their way, within the limits allowed, to be approachable and to

discuss problems. While differences remained, serious efforts were being made to resolve them. He further asked for practical steps to this end, including regular meetings with the representatives of UNCA, improved access and transparency, increased availability to the press of the United Nations electronic database of documents, increased representation of the press at Headquarters, and improved accommodations for correspondents. One speaker supported the participation of UNCA as an observer at the current session.

44. One delegation, on behalf of a number of others, urged the Department to devote special attention to the requirements of UNCA. Another delegation supported the request of UNCA for access for its accredited members to all conference rooms, including the General Assembly Hall and the Security Council Chamber, for first-hand coverage of their open meetings. One delegation thought this gesture would have the desired effect of strengthening the transparency of the United Nations system. One representative expressed concern, however, at inappropriate remarks made by the observer for UNCA, which constituted, in his opinion, interference in the internal affairs of a Member State.

45. All speakers welcomed the strengthening of the role of United Nations information centres by the Department, which was greatly enhancing the information activities of the United Nations throughout the world and was contributing to a positive image of the Organization. They emphasized the importance of information centres as focal points for two-way communications between the United Nations and its Member States. One speaker believed that this was particularly important in relation to the newly independent States and those in transition. Several speakers noted that the information centres were performing an essential and useful role, particularly in the developing countries where, because of inadequate resources, the media had more limited access to information. One representative commented that, during the past year, the network of centres had facilitated access to regional responses to the Organization's activities, in particular to the World Summit for Social Development and the International Conference on Population and Development. He noted also that booklets and background papers had been produced in several local languages, including Bahasa Indonesia.

46. Many delegations expressed support for the policy of integration, on a case-by-case basis, where appropriate, in consultation with the host Government and provided the functional autonomy of the information component was preserved. One speaker noted that this process had not affected the level of efficiency under which the integrated information centres operated. Another speaker, on behalf of others, said that his group was pleased with the way the integration of United Nations information centres in certain countries had been carried out. Another speaker, however, said that, while the decision to integrate some centres might have had virtue, it could also possibly create new problems in regard to the functioning of those centres as effective and independent institutions. One speaker said that prior consultations with the host Governments and also with the Committee on Information must be held in the implementation of this exercise.

47. One speaker expressed interest in establishing an information component within the office of the United Nations Development Programme at Sofia, and was sympathetic with other countries having similar aspirations. Another speaker

expressed hope for the continued active role of the United Nations information centre in Moscow, under the new Director, especially with regard to the dissemination of information in Russian. Another representative said that his delegation was still looking forward to the nomination of a Director for the United Nations information centre at Beirut. His Government would spare no effort in cooperating with the Department to enhance the role of the centre, in order to restore its importance in the country and the region. According to one delegation, the United Nations information centre at Dhaka had been without a Director for the last few years, and it asked the Department to nominate one as soon as possible. Another speaker expressed his country's appreciation for the appointment of a professional information officer to the United Nations information centre at Tehran and the reactivation of that centre. Another speaker looked forward to the early addition of an information component within the United Nations office in his country, which was one of the youngest democracies of the international community. One speaker reiterated his delegation's request for a United Nations information centre at Port-au-Prince, and another repeated the request for a centre at Conakry. One speaker asked for the Department to re-establish the post of Director of the centre in his country as a contribution in the field of preventive diplomacy.

48. One speaker said that the University for Peace in her country was successfully disseminating information on the work of the United Nations, and another said that the Department, in collaboration with the University, should publicize information that enhanced positive developments in the area of peace. One representative, stressing the importance and pivotal role of United Nations information centres, said it was alarming that since the early 1990s there had been a steady decline in host countries' contributions for centres, and it was important to reverse this trend. An agreement was being finalized between his country and the Department which would cover the legal basis upon which the United Nations centre in his capital operated and would create more favourable conditions for its multifaceted activities, which his Government intended to support financially. Several speakers urged the Department to continue to make all the necessary efforts to address the question of the imbalances in the allocation of funds to the United Nations information centres. One speaker said that he hoped that the Department would continue to make genuine efforts to bring some sort of defensible balance in the extent of resources and facilities it provided to its regional centres throughout the world.

49. Several speakers commented on the importance of the Department's outreach to non-governmental organizations, highlighting the importance of the annual Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization conference. One speaker suggested that it be complemented by regional conferences. Another speaker emphasized the great public information potential of the network of United Nations depository libraries. He noted that his Government had cooperated with the Department the previous year on a project which involved a professional librarian from the Dag Hammarskjöld Library visiting the 13 depositories in his country to inspect the status of their current operation. One major observation which resulted was that the local library staffs needed greater guidance and training from Headquarters librarians to make more effective use of United Nations materials, which were often highly specialized documents. He hoped that the conclusions reached in the project would prove useful to other depository libraries around the world. In this connection he

believed that the host countries could greatly assist, and he called upon other Member States with depositories to consider ways in which to make better use of this valuable resource in bringing United Nations activities to the attention of the broader public.

50. The guided tours were of particular interest and concern to a number of delegations in the debate. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, emphasized that visitors to the United Nations should not be prohibited from access to the Security Council or General Assembly simply on the grounds that meetings were taking place. Several speakers maintained that guided tours should be presented in the widest possible range of languages, which should be considered in the selection of guides. Another speaker reiterated this point, saying that visitors should meet as few closed doors as possible. One speaker noted in particular with satisfaction that the disarmament exhibit in the first-floor corridor of the conference building, which had been inaccessible to visitors for some time, had recently been reinstated as part of the tour. His delegation attached particular attention to those exhibits, which included materials from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as an expression of the aspirations of people everywhere for nuclear disarmament and world peace. He thanked the Department of Public Information and the Department of Administration and Management for working out this arrangement, at the same time welcoming any additional measures that could help make United Nations tours a more informative and inspirational experience.

51. At the close of the general debate, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information expressed his appreciation for the kind words of support addressed to him personally and to his staff members. He emphasized that such progress could not have been achieved without the close collaboration and mutual confidence between the Department and the Committee.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

2/ Ibid., Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/36/21); ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/39/21); ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/40/21); ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/41/21); ibid., Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21); ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/43/21); ibid., Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/44/21); ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/45/21); ibid., Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/46/21); ibid., Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/47/21); ibid., Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/48/21).

3/ Ibid., Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/49/21).

ANNEX

Paper on media strategies for peace-keeping and other field operations

A widespread perception has developed in United Nations circles concurrently with the dramatic growth in the number of peace-keeping and other field operations in recent years: that the Department of Public Information is responsible for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of such missions. This perception is far from reality.

While the Department disseminates information on peace-keeping operations, in all other respects the professional expertise and existing infrastructure already in existence in the Department remain largely untapped and its involvement in conceptualizing, planning, implementing and coordinating the information programmes of field operations has so far been minimal. Nor have the Department's expertise and experience been used in all cases to identify staff, both internally and externally, for rapid deployment to field missions. If it were, accountability could be ensured, thereby eliminating waste associated with the recruitment of transient officers. Thus, the Department's role as the focal point and coordinating mechanism for public information activities in the Secretariat - long recognized by the General Assembly - has not been activated with regard to peace-keeping. In the last year, however, the heads of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and Department of Public Information have developed closer links in the approach to questions relating to public information activities associated with peace-keeping missions.

The growing expectation that the United Nations information activities should help foster better understanding of the purposes of peace-keeping and peacemaking, correct misperceptions, counter hostile propaganda and create a favourable environment for the smooth operation of a mission has created new challenges in the area of public information. It has also given public information programmes an essential role and responsibility in ensuring the success of peace-keeping and other field missions: hence the need for a coordinated and unified public information strategy aimed at increasing public understanding and support for the peace-making role of the United Nations. In his supplement to an Agenda for Peace, the Secretary-General underlined the vital role played by an effective information capacity and the importance of establishing such a capacity at the early planning stages of each and every field mission.

The Department of Public Information disseminates information on peace-keeping through the network of United Nations information centres and services located in 68 countries. Currently, a wide range of information material is prepared and produced at Headquarters for dissemination. The Department's audio-visual services also regularly produce and disseminate information on peace-keeping via its broadcast transcriptions, the Electronic Bulletin Board, and videos and films.

The following measures are suggested:

1. It is necessary that inter-departmental consultations and coordination between the Department of Public Information, which acts as focal point for public information activities within the Secretariat, and the substantive departments - the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Political Affairs - are undertaken at the very earliest stages of planning for any field mission. This would enable the Secretariat to coordinate its efforts in the field of information. It would bring together the substantive input, i.e., the message, which is the responsibility of the Departments of Peace-keeping Operations, Political Affairs and Humanitarian Affairs, with the means for dissemination, i.e., the medium, which is the responsibility of the Department of Public Information.

2. Early involvement of the Department of Public Information would ensure cost-efficiency and avoid fragmentation of resources and activities in the field of public information, as well as duplication of efforts. Moreover, the implementation of the observation by the Secretary-General in his report on effective planning, budgeting and administration of peace-keeping operations that "when public information activities are specific to a particular operation ... (the costs involved) will be covered from the individual peace-keeping budget account" (A/48/945) requires the participation of the Department.

3. As soon as signals are received indicating that an emergency situation requiring United Nations intervention may arise, consultations should begin on the expected public information requirements and the development of an information strategy. Such consultations should take place within a standing inter-departmental working group on information strategies, comprising representatives from the Departments of Peace-keeping Operations, Political Affairs and Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Public Information, which would meet as required.

4. Coordination between the departments would also allow the preparation by the Department of Public Information of rosters of personnel required to carry out the various functions associated with the public information activities of a peace-keeping or other field mission. This would save time and allow for the rapid establishment of an information component at the very start of a mission. These rosters should draw on personnel from the Secretariat, the media and delegations of Member States that possess the relevant media and political experience. This would enable mission recruitment to take place in an organized manner and would ensure greater accountability and responsibility of such personnel.

5. In order to facilitate the Organization's response to the demand for mission-related information, a set of draft standards should be developed by the Department of Public Information. These draft standards should serve as a tool for the planning of mission information strategies and related Headquarters activities. Emphasis should be placed on the most cost-effective minimum information requirements, in recognition of the budgetary constraints common to all peace-keeping missions. The draft standards should identify a basic information programme, as well as additional supplementary activities that could be carried out according to

the mission's mandates and requirements. A fragmentary, ad hoc and late-hour conception and implementation of peace-keeping information programmes has led to diminished impact, an incoherent message and costly information activities purporting to serve peace-keeping operations.

6. The goal of an integrated information programme should be to enhance the effectiveness of the mission, both in the area of the mission and internationally, by fostering a better understanding of the United Nations mandate. It should, therefore, consist of two parts: an internal programme within the area of the mission, and an external programme for the international community at large, particularly troop-contributing and donor countries. Parameters for each part should be detailed in the programme design, programme outputs, expected functions, personnel requirements, and equipment and supplies.

An integrated information strategy would target public opinion in countries providing support to peace-keeping operations as well as those hosting peace-keeping missions. Such an approach would help build a solid consensus in support of peace-keeping missions among contributing countries and establish a positive environment for those missions in the countries of deployment. Moreover, this approach would help avoid duplication and fragmentation of public information programmes, disseminate a consistent message on peace-keeping and achieve cost-effectiveness.